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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the findings of a study that examined what states know about several aspects of accountability for students with disabilities at the district level. As part of an annual survey of states conducted by the National Center on Educational Outcomes, state directors of special education from all 50 states answered questions on state policy and practices pertaining to assessment and accountability for students with disabilities. Findings indicate that while 47 states disaggregated state assessment performance by district, only 11 states collect data from districts on the participation rates of students with disabilities on district assessments. While almost all states collect and disaggregate, by district, data on state assessment performance, it is not clear that this information includes students with disabilities. The report concludes by recommending that states give more attention to how students with disabilities are doing on district assessments, since this information is an important and necessary part of evaluating and improving education reform. Two tables are included that illustrate state data collection from districts on the participation rate and the performance of students with disabilities on district assessments. (CR)

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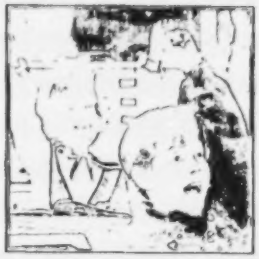

State Level Awareness of the Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities on District Assessments

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Table of Contents

Issue Brief Highlights	2
Introduction	3
Method	4
Results	5
Discussion	6
References	7
Table One	8
Table Two	9

State Level Awareness of the Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities on District Assessments

Issue Brief Highlights

This EPRRI study asks if states are collecting information on the participation and performance of students with disabilities on district assessments. The question is important because:

- Education reform, with its emphasis on standards, testing, and accountability, is carried out at the district level.
- Local school districts are responsible for giving students with disabilities meaningful access to the general curriculum and to assessment systems, as required by the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- IDEA requires the states to monitor and report on the progress of education reform. To provide accurate information to the U.S. Department of Education, and to help implement reforms in their local districts, states need to know about district assessments.

However, when we surveyed state directors of special education about compiling data for students with disabilities, we learned that:

- Only 22% of states collect data on the participation rates of students with disabilities on district assessments.
- Only 12% collect data on these students' performance on the assessments.
- While almost all states collect and disaggregate - by district - data on state (as opposed to district) assessment performance, it's not clear that this information includes students with disabilities.

We recommend that states give more attention to how students with disabilities are doing on district assessments, since this information is an important and necessary part of evaluating and improving education reform.

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5

introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) requires that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum. Further, they must be included in assessment systems that accurately reflect their performance so they can be part of a school district's educational accountability system. These requirements and the move toward standards and accountability in the education of students with disabilities have raised the issue of whether students with disabilities have meaningful access to the general curriculum and standards. Since accountability is typically measured by student performance on standardized assessments (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997), questions about access often become questions about the inclusion of students with disabilities in accountability systems (Krentz, Thurlow, & Callender, 2000).

Although each state develops standards, assessment, and accountability processes, the responsibility for implementing reforms rests at the local district level. Districts take the lead in managing accountability for student outcomes (McDonnell et al., 1997). Many districts impose requirements beyond those of the state by expanding or developing additional content standards, adding local assessments, or increasing student performance requirements.

Sanctions and/or incentives for a school or district, imposed by the state, often are linked to student performance on assessments. This raises the issue of whether states are aware of local districts' policies on assessment or accountability, particularly in relation to students with disabilities. Although there are several studies of reform policies at the state level, there have not been many studies of local district reform policies focused on students with disabilities (Gagnon, McLaughlin, & Rhim, 2000).

This study examines what states know about several aspects of accountability for students at the district level. Using a survey of state directors of special education, we asked about state practices in compiling and gathering district assessment participation and performance data for students with disabilities.

Method

As part of the annual survey of states conducted by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), state directors of special education from all 50 states answered questions on state policy and practices pertaining to assessment and accountability for students with disabilities (Thompson & Thurlow, 2001).

All states responded, and responses to the survey were gathered online (see http://education.umn.edu/NCEO/NCEOSurveys/SpEdDirectors_Survey.htm to view the instrument)

States are mandated by IDEA to report biennially on the participation of students with disabilities on state and district assessments. States are also obligated to report on progress toward meeting their goals for the performance of students with disabilities on assessments (both state and district). In this year's survey, state directors were asked whether state assessment performance data are disaggregated by district. They were also asked whether they collect data from districts on the participation rates and performance of students with disabilities on district assessments.

States are mandated by IDEA to report biennially on the participation of students with disabilities on state and district assessments.

Results

Disaggregation of State Assessment Performance Data by District

Forty-seven state directors reported that state assessment performance data are disaggregated by district; only three states (South Dakota, Iowa, and South Carolina) indicated that they do not do this. Several states that do disaggregate data provided details. For example, in Colorado, districts and schools receive disaggregated data, but the scores of students with IEPs are not reported in the state summaries. In Hawaii, performance data are disaggregated by school and statewide, as well as by district. In Wyoming, the disaggregated report is confidential for districts with fewer than 10 students in a special education category.

Iowa, which does not disaggregate data by district, said it does not have a state level assessment system. Instead, each district has access to its own performance data. It is possible that Nebraska, which also lacks a state level assessment system, responded that data are disaggregated because district data are reported at the district level.

State Collection of District Assessment Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities

Eleven state directors reported collecting data from districts on the participation rates of students with disabilities on district assessments. Thirty-four states do not collect the information. Maryland has yet to make a decision on this, and state directors from Georgia and Mississippi do not know about their state's collection of these rates. In the "other" category, Iowa collects participation rates for some, but not all, types of its districts' assessments; Kansas encourages districts to collect participation data and will be including them in its routine data analysis in the future.

Eleven state directors reported collecting data from districts on the participation rates of students with disabilities on district assessments.

Wyoming collects district data through its accreditation process. Hawaii and Texas do not have district assessments. In Michigan, collecting district participation rates is strictly a local responsibility, while Montana and Vermont reported that local assessments will be included in the state accountability system in the near future. Responses by state are summarized in Table 1.

State Collection of District Assessment Performance Data

Six state directors reported that their states collect data from districts on the performance of students with disabilities on district assessments. Thirty-seven states do not collect these data. Specific comments on district performance data were similar to comments about participation data detailed above. In addition, Ohio reported not deciding whether to collect district performance data. Responses by state are summarized in Table 2.

Discussion

Only 22 % of states collect district assessment participation data and only 12% collect district assessment performance data on students with disabilities. These findings suggest that, with a goal of increased participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments, states may need to give more attention to their district assessments.

These findings suggest that, with a goal of increased participation of students with disabilities in state and district assessments, states may need to give more attention to their district assessments.

Since virtually all states disaggregate state assessment performance data by district, at least one indicator of performance per district is available. But it is not clear that these states disaggregate data on the participation and performance of students with disabilities.

States need to know how their students with disabilities are doing on all assessments, both state and district, in order to monitor the progress of state educational reforms. The U.S. Department of Education monitors the states to see how national reforms are affecting education, and relies on the information provided by states for this determination. Since reforms are implemented at the district level, district data are crucial to the reform process.

We recommend that all states collect data from their districts on students with disabilities - on both state and district assessments - so that states can more effectively work with districts that need assistance implementing reforms, and so that states have more accurate data to report to the U.S. Department of Education. All of these efforts together will help our nation better determine how effective reform legislation has been.

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Table One

State Data Collection from Districts on the Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities on District Assessments

State	Yes	No	Undecided	No Info	*Other
Alabama		X			
Alaska	X				
Arizona		X			
Arkansas		X			
California		X			
Colorado		X			
Connecticut		X			
Delaware		X			
Florida		X			
Georgia				X	
Hawaii		X			
Idaho		X			
Illinois		X			
Indiana	X				
Iowa					X
Kansas					X
Kentucky		X			
Louisiana		X			
Maine	X				
Maryland			X		
Massachusetts		X			
Michigan		X			
Minnesota		X			
Mississippi				X	
Missouri		X			
Montana		X			
Nebraska	X				
Nevada		X			
New Hampshire		X			
New Jersey		X			
New Mexico		X			
New York		X			
North Carolina		X			
North Dakota	X				
Ohio	X				
Oklahoma		X			
Oregon		X			
Pennsylvania		X			
Rhode Island	X				
South Carolina		X			
South Dakota		X			
Tennessee	X				
Texas		X			
Utah		X			
Vermont		X			
Virginia		X			
Washington	X				
West Virginia		X			
Wisconsin	X				
Wyoming	X				
Totals	**11 states (22%)**	**34 states (68%)**	**1 state (2%)**	**2 states (4%)**	**2 states (4%)**

Yes - State does collect these data.
No - State does no collect these data.
Undecided - State has not decided whether to collect these data.
No information - State director of special education does not have information on whether the state collects these data.
*Other IA: Information concerning participation in districtwide assessment is collected only for ITBS and ITED participation. Additional districtwide assessment is conducted for which the state does not collect participation data. Each district is required to use additional assessments to measure progress on locally determined content standards in at least reading, mathematics, and science. KS: The state accountability system (i.e., QPA) encourages local school districts to collect these data. Special Education's change to continuous improvement monitoring over the next 5 years will include this as part of data analysis.

Table Two

State Data Collection from Districts on the Performance of Students with Disabilities on District Assessments

State	Yes	No	Undecided	No Info	Other
Alabama		X			
Alaska		X			
Arizona		X			
Arkansas		X			
California		X			
Colorado		X			
Connecticut		X			
Delaware		X			
Florida		X			
Georgia				X	
Hawaii		X			
Idaho		X			
Illinois		X			
Indiana		X			
Iowa					X
Kansas					X
Kentucky		X			
Louisiana		X			
Maine	X				
Maryland			X		
Massachusetts		X			
Michigan		X			
Minnesota		X			
Mississippi				X	
Missouri		X			
Montana		X			
Nebraska	X				
Nevada		X			
New Hampshire					X
New Jersey		X			
New Mexico		X			
New York		X			
North Carolina		X			
North Dakota	X				
Ohio			X		
Oklahoma		X			
Oregon		X			
Pennsylvania		X			
Rhode Island	X				
South Carolina		X			
South Dakota		X			
Tennessee	X				
Texas		X			
Utah		X			
Vermont		X			
Virginia		X			
Washington	X				
West Virginia		X			
Wisconsin		X			
Wyoming		X			
Totals	**6 states (12%)**	**37 states (74%)**	**2 states (4%)**	**2 states (4%)**	**3 states (6%)**

Yes - State does collect these data.
No - State does not collect these data.
Undecided - State has not decided whether to collect these data.
No information - State director of special education does not have information on whether the state collects these data.
*Other - IA: Data on districtwide assessment are collected by the state only for ITBS and ITED results. KS: This is optional information that local schools may choose to include as part of their accountability report to the state. NH: No explanation provided.

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